



April 4, 2021

Kimberly D. Bose
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First St. NE, Room 1A
Washington, D.C. 20426

RE: Docket No. P-15056-000, 'Application for Preliminary Permit for Document of Premium Energy Holdings, LLC Ashokan PSP under P-15056

Dear Ms. Bose,

On behalf of the County of Greene, New York and its residents I urge the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission FERC to decline the request made by Premium Energy Holdings, LLC for a preliminary permit for the Ashokan Pumped Storage Project, P-15056.

The construction, operation and maintenance of the upper reservoir for alternative 1 (Stony Clove Reservoir) to operate the proposed Ashokan Pumped Storage Power Plant will have significant deleterious impacts to the residents of Greene County as well as to our economic, natural, cultural and transportation resources.

Application Completeness and Proper Notifications

Greene County and the Town of Hunter in Greene County should have been part of the notification process for this project. The application is incomplete in Premium Energy Holdings, LLC failed to recognize the Town of Hunter and Greene County as impacted communities.

Under 'ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUIRED BY 18 C.F. R. Sec 4:32(a)', number 2(i), the application fails to recognize Greene County as a county in which any part of the project, and any Federal facilities that would be used by the project. Likewise, in 2(ii) the application fails to identify the Town of Hunter. While the Town of Hunter has a population of less than 5,000 people, as does the Town of Olive, and is located within 15 miles of the project, it should have been part of the application notification. Similarly, in 2(iii), the Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District should be listed in the application and notified as well.

Hydropower in the Catskill Forest Preserve

While hydropower is considered part of the New York's clean energy future, the devastating impacts to local communities, the environment and to the local tourism industry far outweigh any 'clean' energy benefits of this proposed project.

**Greene County
Economic Development,
Tourism & Planning**

411 Main Street, Suite 419
Catskill, New York 12414

Warren Hart
Director



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It is also questionable if this application meets the *New York State Clean Energy Standard RES Tier 1 Certification Submission Instructions and Eligibility Guidelines* as prepared by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, Version 1.3, May 2019.¹

NYSERDA guidelines state that qualifying hydroelectric resources are new low-impact, run-of-river or incremental upgrades.

The production associated with a new hydroelectric project must meet the following criteria:

- *run-of-river operation and no new storage impoundments.*

Catskill Forest Preserve

This project proposal is within the Catskills Forest Preserve. The project would be devastating to the significant and treasured natural resources that make up the Catskill Forest Preserve

Under Article XIV of the NYS Constitution, it is clearly guaranteed that these lands “shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private.” The Preserve currently contains 700,000 acres of continuous wildlife habitat (very rare in our increasingly fragmented environment), and the forest around the proposed sites ranks among the top 1% of forest habitats region-wide, according to the New York State Forest Condition Index. The proposal will have detrimental impacts on this protected and ecologically important land. Agencies such as the U.S. Department of Energy have recognized that development on such lands should be avoided.

As measured by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York’s Natural Heritage Program, this forest patch scores in the 99.9 percentile of Hudson Valley forests.² “The forest patch is in the top 1% for carbon sequestration, local connectedness, patch size and 6 other components, and in the top 5% for regional connectivity, older forest, low man-made stressors, and 1 other component.”³



¹ <https://www.nyserdera.ny.gov/All-Programs/Programs/Clean-Energy-Standard/Renewable-Generators-and-Developers/RES-Tier-One-Eligibility/Eligibility>

² <https://gisservices.dec.ny.gov/gis/hvnrm/>

³ <https://www.nynhp.org/projects/hudson-valley-forest-patches/>

The pumping and movement of water from such a project can affect sediment movement and stream ecology. Sediment impacts from the Ashokan Reservoir water releases on other area waterbodies, like the Esopus Creek are already a major environmental and economic issue for downstream communities. The proposed pump storage project stands to potentially further adversely impact this drinking water supply.

Damage to Local Communities

Premium Energy's proposal would be deeply damaging to local communities. Based on project information submitted to-date, it appears that the construction of Upper Reservoir Alternative 1: the new Stony Clove Reservoir would have devastating impacts to the hamlet of Lanesville in the Town of Hunter, Greene County. A 212-foot dam creating a reservoir covering 245 acres with a capacity of 22,496 acre-foot would destroy the hamlet of Lanesville in Greene County. The Stony Clove Reservoir and any conceivable upper reservoir site in the Catskill Forest Preserve would require the condemnation of homes and private property via eminent domain—a process that already displaced thousands when the Ashokan was constructed 100 years ago.

In the hamlet of Lanesville in Greene County, approximately 300 homes and businesses will be directly impacted by this project with approximately 100 destroyed in the direct footprint of the reservoir. Residents displaced by the Ashokan Pumped Storage Project will be hard pressed to relocate locally due to housing availability and affordability in the region.

Scenic Roads

Stony Clove Road/ NYS Rte. 214⁴ is part of the New York Scenic Road/Scenic By-Way program. Three route segments within the Town of Hunter were officially designated New York State Scenic Roads in the early 1990s under the leadership of the Town of Hunter and Catskill Center for Conservation and Development. Stony Clove Road, NYS Route 214 is one of these three corridors, along with Kaaterskill and Platte Cloves. In 1992, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Scenic Roads Program was abolished, but at the same point the State's Scenic Byways Program was created by the Legislature. As a result, the three corridor segments became recognized as Scenic Byways.

Impacts to Tourism

Beyond the problem of community displacement, there is also the proposed project's effect on the Catskills' growing tourism economy, which generated 17% of employment in the Catskill region in 2019, and is a \$1.6 billion industry, supporting roughly 20,000 jobs.

According to a New York State's tourism report, in 2019 travelers spent \$192 million in Greene County, a 4.1% increase, supporting 3,378 jobs. Greene County is very dependent upon tourism with 14.6% of all labor income and 23.2% of all employment sustained by visitors. Travelers create direct economic value within a discreet group of sectors (e.g. recreation, transportation). This supports a relative proportion of jobs, wages, taxes, and GDP within each sector. Each

⁴ <https://www.dot.ny.gov/display/programs/scenic-byways/ScenicRoads-no-detailed-info>

directly affected sector also purchases goods and services as inputs (e.g. food wholesalers, utilities) into production.

If not for tourism, the average household in Greene County would have to pay an additional \$1,333 to maintain the same level of government services.

The Catskill Park has 705,500-acres of wilderness with scenic views, year-round outdoor recreation, and an abundance of attractions, lodging facilities, restaurants, and unique cultural events. The Great Northern Catskills of Greene County has five of the 10 highest Catskill Peaks in the Catskill State Park and is host to hiking trails boasting a plethora of birding, wildlife viewing and outdoor recreation. The scenic beauty makes it a perfect place for a Sunday drive through the river, valley and mountaintop regions. Hunter and Windham Mountain welcomes skiers and riders of all abilities for year-round adventure. Several lakes and streams surround the county and are visited by avid anglers looking to score the biggest trout.

New York State's tourism economy expanded in 2018 with 6.2% growth in traveler spending, reaching a new high of \$71.8 billion—35% above the state's pre-recession peak set in 2008. Tourism is most important to the Adirondacks and Catskills, generating 19% and 17% of total employment, respectively. Tourism in the Catskills is a \$1.5 billion industry, supporting 19,526 jobs. In recent years, the strongest growth in traveler spending occurred in the Catskills.

Transportation

There are only two primary roads that lead into Greene County from the south that support traveler access to the scenic beauty of Greene County, New York State Routes 42 and 214. The proposed Stony Clove Reservoir would cut off the connection of NY Route 214 from Ulster County to Greene County into the Town of Hunter. The Town of Hunter supports a variety of businesses serving year-round residents, second-home owners and seasonal visitors. Premium Energy's project would limit access to hiking, fishing, and other forms of recreation in the Catskills, decrease the area's natural beauty, cut off access to skiing and concerts at Hunter Mountain, Hunter, and Tannersville, and otherwise diminish tourism in the region, negatively affecting businesses in Greene County and beyond.

Destruction of our transportation infrastructure will not only have serious negative impacts on the local economies of places like the Town of Hunter but will also limit access of emergency vehicles to the southern portion of Greene County.

As we transition to renewable, clean energy sources, it is imperative that we make smart siting choices to protect our natural, cultural and economic resources. Greene County urges FERC to deny Premium Energy's proposal for a preliminary permit for the Ashokan Pumped Storage Project P-15056 and that Premium Energy find a suitable alternative location for a pumped storage project, one where the construction and operation will not destroy protected wilderness, displace vulnerable communities, destroy local economies and threaten important natural, cultural, and historic resources.

Sincerely,

Warren Hart

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large 'W' followed by a horizontal line and a small peak at the end.

Deputy County Administrator

CC: Greene County Legislature
Hunter Town Board
Coalition of Watershed Towns
The Catskill Center
Congressman Antonio Delgado, NY 19th District
NYS Senator Michelle Hinchey, 46th District
NYS Assembly Chris Tague, 102nd District